TELLS THE FACTS AND NAMES THE NAMES

CounterPunch

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A Citizen's Counter Strategy

Ten Ideas to Starve the Wall Street Beast

By Pam Martens

Thinking Americans can no longer wait for politicians to save us. I offer here ten ideas to get started on the first course of starving the Wall Street beast. I'm suggesting putting the wealth back into the hands from which it was taken in a rigged wealth transfer scheme.

1. Shorten Your Home Mortgage: Former Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis summed it up: "We can have democracy in this country, or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both." The Wall Street beast is thriving on interest on our debt and using it to hire lobbyists and fund politicians who will work for their interests, not ours.

According to March 31, 2009, data from the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, four Wall Street behemoths control 35 per cent of all the insured bank deposits in the U.S.A. and 46 per cent of the assets (although the quality of those "assets" is very much a subject of debate). Those firms are: Bank of America Corporation, JPMorgan Chase & Co., Wells Fargo & Co., and Citigroup, Inc. That leaves the other 8,242 FDIC-insured banking institutions to share the balance. The total domestic deposits were $7.5 trillion with total assets of $13.5 trillion as of March 2009. That is far too much wealth concentration in too few hands, as we've sadly learned from having to bail out those four institutions.

Seek your accountant and/or financial advisor's counsel about converting your

MARTENS CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Israel and Palestine: What Next?

Is a Game-Changing Break Possible?

By Jeff Halper

Jerusalem

Struggling as I have for the past decades to grasp the dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and find ways to get out of this interminable conflict, I have been two-thirds successful. After many years of political activism and analysis, I think I have put my finger on the first third of the equation: what is the problem? My answer, which has withstood the test of time and today is so evident that it elicits the response, "…duh," is that all Israeli governments are unwaveringly determined to maintain complete control of Palestine and Israel from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River, frustrating any just and workable solution based on Palestinian claims to self-determination. There will be no negotiated settlement, period.

The second part of the equation – how can the conflict be resolved? – is also easily answerable. I don't mean entering into the one-state/two-state conundrum and deciding which option is better. Under certain circumstances both could work, and I can think of at least three or four other viable options as well, including my favorite, a Middle Eastern economic confederation. The Palestinian think tank *Passia* published a collection of 12 proposed solutions a few years ago. What I mean is, it is not difficult to identify the essential elements of *any* solution. They are, in brief, the following:

- A just, workable and lasting peace must be inclusive of the two peoples living in Palestine and Israel;
- any solution must provide for a national expression of each people, not merely a democratic formula based on one person – one vote;
- it must provide economic viability to all the parties;
- no solution will work if it is not based on human rights, international law and U.N. resolutions;
- the refugee issue, based on the right of return, must be addressed squarely;
- a workable peace must be regional in scope; it cannot be confined merely to Israel and Palestine;
- a just peace must address the security concerns of all the parties and countries in the region.

These seven elements must configure *any* just solution. If they are all included, a settlement of the conflict could take many different forms. If, however, even one is missing, *no* solution will work, no matter how good it looks on paper.

That leaves the third and most intractable part of the equation: how do we get there? Employing the linear analysis we have used over the years, we can't. In those terms we are at the dead end of a dead process. Israel will never end its occupation voluntarily; the best it may agree to is apartheid, but the permanent warehousing of the Palestinians is what it has in mind. Given the massive "facts on the ground" Israel has imposed on the Occupied Territories, the international community will not exert enough pressure on Israel to realize even a two-state solution (which leaves Israel on 78 per cent of historic Palestine, with no right of return for refugees. Given the veto power over any political process enjoyed by the U.S. Congress, locked into an unshakable bipartisan "pro-Israel" position, the international community cannot exert that required pressure. And the Palestinians,

HALPER CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

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MARTENS CONT. FROM PAGE 1, COL 1

30-year mortgage to a 15-year one, to move wealth from the bank's shareholders pockets to yours. Rates have never been more favorable for such a move. Typically, over the life of the loan, you will save tens of thousands of dollars of interest. You can look at the savings for your specific situation by clicking on the mortgage calculator at www.bankrate.com. (I'm not endorsing any of the bank loans offered at this site because I haven't done any research in that area; I'm just suggesting the use of the mortgage calculator.)

Talk to your children before they buy a home about the interest differential between a 30-year and 15-year mortgage over the life of the loan. Show them how to use the mortgage calculator.

2. Think Local: Consider moving money, as it becomes liquid, out of the big Wall Street banks that have an iron grip on your Congress and moving it into FDIC-insured certificates of deposit at your community bank (being careful not to exceed the insurance limits). A good rule of thumb is to ladder maturities to coincide with when you will need the money. Again, you should consult with your accountant and/or financial advisor. This move will also help provide loan funds to local businesses and residential housing in your area.

3. Start a Business: Don't worry about the possible arrival of the pink slip; be proactive. Start a business on the side. Do well by doing good: think, what product or service can you provide that a struggling consumer wants and can afford. (Ideas might include: debt counseling, low-cost childcare, foreclosure counseling, a pick-your-own fruit and vegetable business if you own farm land, consignment shop, home-staging services to help with quicker resales.)

4. Invest Wisely: Get smart with your 401(k). Investing in the S&P 500 is simply feeding the beast that's using your cheap capital to hire lobbyists, create Political Action Committees and separate you from representative government. Some 401(k) plans allow you to roll over 50 per cent or more to your own IRA after reaching a certain age. Call your benefits office and find out what your options are. Speak to your accountant and/or financial advisor before making any move. You may also want to consider opening an IRA at a community bank and buying insured CDs as an alternative to putting more funds in the 401(k).

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5.Check Out Credit Union Membership: Do you have a family member that belongs to a Credit Union? Chances are they can get you an account there. If you need to use a credit card, try to get one through the Credit Union at a reasonable rate and then cut up any high-rate card. It's an outrage that some of the banks which required a citizen bailout are getting their money from the Federal Reserve at almost no cost while charging struggling citizens 20 per cent interest.

6. Don't Use Credit Cards from Corporations That Abuse You: All of the following have one thing in common: Home Depot, Exxon Mobil, Shell, Macy's, Sears, Zales. They all extend credit to their customers on a Citigroup credit card. Forty million customers are helping to prop up Citigroup and its anti-consumer, anti-citizen practices by using these cards. Citigroup makes its workers sign away their rights to go to court (see number 8 below) and has abused investors through corrupt practices.

7. Brand Attacks: Chances are high that your local storeowners don't have a PAC and lobbyists on K Street working against your interests. Reward them with your business and starve the S&P 500 firms until they get the message: if you want me to honor your brand, honor my right to representative government.

8. Return the Courts to Workers: Many of the largest corporations force workers to sign away their rights to the nation's courts as a condition of employment. It's called mandatory arbitration, and it's an unfair process that is rigged to favor the corporation. If you are being interviewed for a new job, ask if the company has such a policy and walk away if they do.

9. Complain: Don't let shady practices go undetected. Write a report and file it with the appropriate body: local district attorney, state attorney general's office, consumer protection groups; and write a letter to the editor to the local paper. This helps good businesses prosper and starves dirty businesses of customers.

10. Just Say No to frontal nudity photographs/skin radiation/genitalia groping – all just to board a plane. Don't fly. You will be standing up for civil rights and starving Wall Street. Body scanner companies trade on Wall Street and the banksters are hoping domestic surveillance is their new cash cow. **CP**

These proposals formed part of a longer piece by Pam Martens available on our website at www.counterpunch.org/martens11232010.html

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fragmented and with weak leadership, have no clout. Indeed, they're not even in the game. In terms of any sort of rational, linear, government-led peace process, we have arrived at the end of the road.

And yet, I'm optimistic that 2011 will witness a game-changing break that will create a new set of circumstances in which a just peace is possible. That jolt which smashes the present dead-end paradigm must come from outside the present process. It can take one of two forms. The first possible game-changer is already being discussed: a unilateral declaration by the Palestinian Authority of a state based on the 1949 armistice lines (the 1967 "Green Line"), which then applies for membership in the U.N. This, I believe, would force the hand of the international community. Most of the countries of the world would recognize a Palestinian state – including some in Europe – placing the U.S.A., Britain, Germany and other reluctant powers in a difficult if not impossible situation. Indeed, a new, or reaffirmed Palestinian declaration of independence within those boundaries would be a unilateral act but rather one done in agreement with the member states of the U.N., who have accepted the 1949/1967 borders as the basis of a solution. It conforms as well to Bush's "Road Map" peace initiative led by the U.S.A. itself.

Such a scenario is unlikely, if only because the leadership of the Palestinian Authority lacks the courage to undertake such a bold initiative. A second one seems more likely: in 2011, the Palestinian Authority will either resign or collapse, throwing the occupation back on the lap of Israel. Given the deadlock in negotiations, I can't see the PA lasting even until August, when (sort of) Prime Minister Salem Fayyad expects the international community to give the Palestinians a state. Even if the 90-day settlement freeze eventually comes into effect, Netanyahu will not negotiate borders – the only issue worth discussing – during that period. Either fed up to the point of resigning – Abbas may be weak and pliable, but he is not a collaborator – or having lost so much credibility with its own people that it simply collapses, the fall of the PA would end definitively the present process.

The end or fall of the PA would create an intolerable and unsustainable situation. Israel would be forced to retake by force all the Occupied Territories, and, not willing to allow Hamas to step into the vacuum, would have to do so violently, perhaps even invading Gaza again and assuming permanent control. Having to support four million impoverished Palestinians with no economic infrastructure whatsoever would be an impossible burden (and, hopefully, the donor community would not enable the re-occupation by stepping in to prevent a humanitarian crisis, as it does today).

Such a move on the part of Israel would also inflame the Muslim world and generate massive protests worldwide, again forcing the hand of the international community. Looked at in this way, the Palestinians have one source of enormous clout: they are the gatekeepers. Until they – the Palestinian people as a whole, not the PA – say the conflict is over, it's not over. Israel and its erstwhile allies have the ability to make life almost unbearable for the Palestinians, but they cannot impose apartheid or warehousing. We, the millions supporting the Palestinian struggle the world over, will not let it go until the Palestinians signal that they have arrived at an agreement that they can live with. Until then, the conflict will remain open and globally disruptive.

In terms of any sort of rational, linear, government-led peace process, we have arrived at the end of the road. And yet, I'm optimistic that 2011 will witness a game-changing break that will create a new set of circumstances in which a just peace is possible.

If any of these scenarios come about and new possibilities of peace arise out of the violence and chaos that will ensue, the real question is: where will we be, the people who support a just, inclusive, workable and sustainable peace? Here, in Israel and Palestine, unfortunately, there is no discussion over what may happen in the next year. Not only do we in the Palestinian and Israeli peace movements fail to give adequate direction and leadership to our civil society allies abroad, we tend to pursue "politics as normal" disconnected from the political processes around us, more reactive than proactive. For instance, despite its crucial importance to the Palestinian struggle, evein if the BDS campaign moves along and accumulates strength, it is not accompanied by focused, timely campaigns intended to seize a political moment. When the Gaza flotilla was attacked and Israel was reeling from international condemnation, Palestinian and Israeli activists from all over the world – including Palestine and Israel – should have kicked into action. Sympathetic parliamentarians (and members of Congress) the world over should have been induced to introduce bills saying that, if the occupation does not end in a year, their governments will end all military aid to Israel and its preferential treatment. They might not have carried the day, but imagine the public debate they would have generated at that point in time. Instead, the political moment fizzled.

We are at the cusp of another such

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moment today, and we still have time – though not much time – to organize. Activist and civil society groups abroad should ask their Palestinian and Israeli counterparts for their evaluation of the political moment and suggestions on what to do should the Palestinian Authority collapse together with the peace process. Thought should be given on how to transform the BDS campaign and the infrastructure of resistance it is creating from a blunt instrument into one capable of more focused resistance – of mobilizing churches, trade unions and universities, for example, and by priming sympathetic politicians to act when the moment arrives. In the absence of an African National Congress-type organization to direct us, we have a much more difficult job of communicating and coordinating our actions. But we are in touch with one another. The political moment looming just weeks or months ahead demands our attention.

Activist and civil society groups abroad should ask their Palestinian and Israeli counterparts for their evaluation of the political moment.

Life in the Occupied Territories is about to get even more difficult, I believe, but perhaps we are finally approaching the breaking point. If that is the case, we must be there for the Palestinians on all the fronts: to protect them, to play our role in pushing the occupation into unsustainability, to resist re-occupation, to act as watchdogs over political processes that threaten to impose apartheid in the guise of a two-state solution, and, ultimately, to ensure that a just and lasting peace emerges. As weak and failed attempts by governments head for collapse, we must pick up the slack – 2011 is upon us. **CP**

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How Real is the Threat of War?

North Korea Deathwatch

By Peter Lee

North Korea is more than a military threat to South Korea and Japan, and an affront to the values of democracy, human rights, and nonproliferation ostensibly promoted by the United States. It is East Asia's last bonanza, a potential El Dorado of underexploited resources and cheap labor inadvertently created by the DPRK's isolationism and its faltering policy of economic self-reliance.

The continued survival of the DPRK and the separation of North Korea from the global economy is, in economic terms, an anomaly, a temporary inefficiency that the invisible hand, directed by the world's inexorable avarice, should sweep aside in a historical heartbeat.

Last year, South Korea's conservative president, Lee Myung-bak, conducted a road show to persuade international financial institutions that the sizable costs of reunification (estimated at somewhere upward of $1.7 trillion) could be covered by the exploitation of North Korea's considerable mineral deposits alone.

The anticipated collapse of the North Korean regime has evolved from a hope and expectation to the cornerstone of Lee Myung-bak's anticipated political legacy – and, almost by default, U.S. policy for the peninsula. North Korea, which has struggled to confound predictions of its imminent demise, has seen its problems compounded by the joint U.S./Republic of Korea (ROK) policy of malign neglect toward engagement with the Pyongyang regime.

Lee Myung-bak is determined to reverse the dynamic toward accommodation and closer economic ties between North and South Korea – and distancing from the United States – initiated under the Sunshine Policy of his predecessors. In its place Lee has substituted his own policy. It pays lip service to diplomatic engagement with North Korea in order to placate the large and suspicious liberal/left component of South Korean public opinion, while tailoring his strategies and actions around the increasing marginalization and eventual eradication of the DPRK regime and reunification under the leadership of the South, in cooperation with the United States.

Wikileaks provides the text of a January 2009 cable from the U.S. Embassy in Seoul, which convincingly describes the actual state of play:

"President Lee is determined not to give in to North Korean pressure. Our Blue House contacts have told us on several occasions that President Lee remained quite comfortable with his North Korea policy and that he is prepared to leave the inter-Korean relations frozen until the end of his term in office, if necessary. It is also our assessment that Lee's more conservative advisors and supporters see the current standoff as a genuine opportunity to push and further weaken the North, even if this might involve considerable brinkmanship. Also favoring the Lee administration's stance is the Korean public, which is calm to the point of apathy about the inter-Korean situation." (http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/186621.)

The United States, mindful of the frustrations and embarrassments it has endured in its direct negotiations with Pyongyang and eager to cooperate with a determined ally in North Asia, has supported Lee Myung-bak's initiatives.

In this situation, the diplomatic odd man out has been China, which has attempted to midwife the DPRK's emergence from geopolitical isolation through the mechanism of the Six Party Talks, involving the U.S.A., China, Russia, Japan, and the two Koreas in a dialogue held largely under Beijing's aegis. However, the DPRK has proved a most obstreperous and inconvenient partner in these talks, walking out, detonating atomic devices, firing missiles, and apparently providing ample grounds for the conclusion that it is not a rational negotiating partner.

The U.S.A. and South Korea have, therefore, adopted a policy of ignoring the DPRK, shifting the terms of the relationship to an adversarial process involving the democracies of the West and of North Asia, i.e., the U.S., the ROK and Japan confronting a rogue state, the DPRK. Therefore, the preferred venue of the Lee government and the Obama

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administration has been the United Nations, instead of the Six Party Talks, leaving China standing awkwardly and quite angrily on the sidelines.

This state of affairs was made abundantly clear in the aftermath of the Cheonan incident. The *Cheonan*, a South Korean anti-submarine warfare frigate, was sunk on March 26 under somewhat mysterious circumstances near North Korean waters, with the loss of 46 lives. North Korea, not unreasonably, was presumed to be the culprit, although it denied involvement. The South Korea military, by virtue of its predilection for secrecy and tampering with official records, was unable to come up with a persuasive dossier.

In the end, South Korea convened an international team of experts that pointedly excluded Russia and China, the two nations most familiar with the DPRK's military capabilities, and returned a verdict of North Korean culpability. President Lee agitated for the Cheonan matter to be placed on the U.N. Security Council agenda and received the support of the United States.

However, with China and Russia refusing to endorse the report and additional sanctions against the DPRK, the process concluded with a damp squib – a presidential statement from the UN Security Council that declined to finger Pyongyang for the sinking. President Obama then took the diplomatically questionable step of accusing China of "willful blindness" in ignoring the ROK's Cheonan report. China riposted by hosting DPRK supremo Kim Jung Il on a visit to China at the end of August, with President Hu Jintao flying in for a photo opportunity with Kim.

The high-profile meeting was taken as a statement by China that it would be standing by North Korea and supporting it as the party and government coped with a risky transfer of power from the ailing Kim Jung Il to his 27-year-old, untested son, Kim Jung Un. With his northern flank secured, Kim Jong Il could concentrate on what has been the focus of North Korean diplomacy since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989: regularizing relations with the United States to ensure the survival of his regime.

No peace treaty followed the armistice agreement negotiated at Panmunjon in 1953. The United States maintains a considerable military force in South Korea, 28,000 troops in over a dozen bases. As recently as 2001-2002, when the George W. Bush Korea policy was in the hands of the hardliners, the U.S. pursued a virtually overt policy of regime change against the DPRK.

North Korean geopolitical strategy can be described charitably as unique and, considering the near institutional disdain and occasional outright hostility of the world's own superpower and lukewarm support from its only ally, China, surprisingly successful.

Kim Jung Il has consistently played a swashbuckling diplomatic hand. In recent years, especially after his country's induction into the Axis of Evil by President George W. Bush, he has determined that his regime's primary source of diplomatic leverage and security is best served by playing the WMD bargaining chip and engaging in prolonged and excruciating negotiations to denuclearize the DPRK.

Considering the near institutional disdain and occasional outright hostility of the world's own superpower and lukewarm support from its only ally, North Korea's unique geopolitical strategy has been surprisingly successful.

By developing and testing nuclear devices and ballistic missiles, the DPRK has tried to compel the United States to acknowledge its existence, parley with it as a sovereign state with reasonable prospects for a prolonged survival, provide economic incentives to reward its continued good behavior, and, in the offing, dangle the prospect of meaningful security guarantees and a peace treaty.

The effectiveness of this strategy has, in recent years, been hampered by the deplorable state of the DPRK economy. Flooding, failed harvests, mismanagement, malnutrition, energy shortages, sanctions, and starvation have imbued Kim's diplomacy with desperation, as he has subordinated long-term considerations to the need of securing food-and-energy aid for his tottering economy. These problems are exacerbated by the need to bequeath to Kim Jung Un a reasonably viable regime. The DPRK's weakness is manifest.

The Obama administration has finally made the determination that North Korea will never abandon its nuclear capabilities. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates described U.S. policy when he stated that the United States was "tired of buying the same horse twice," i.e., embarking upon negotiations with Pyongyang that resulted in the flow of aid to the regime but little progress in denuclearization.

Unfortunately, however, the U.S.A. has apparently been unable to figure out what to do with that knowledge beyond a policy of malign neglect, watching Kim's regime twist in the wind and hoping that the transition to Kim Jong Un occasions the collapse of the family business.

China, for its part, has been somewhat more proactive. It continues to supply North Korea with an energy and food lifeline, but it appears that neither side is interested in turning the DPRK into an economic dependency of the PRC. China has become much more interested in the benefits of doing business with the emerging economic powerhouse, South Korea, than propping up North Korea. As a result, at one point, the DPRK took the startling step of threatening to establish civil air links with Taiwan to shock Beijing into increased attentiveness.

Nevertheless, China prefers the continued survival of the DPRK as an independent, viable state capable of managing its relations with the U.S.A. and the ROK, and acting as an effective buffer to the U.S. presence on the southern half of the peninsula – and a check on the ROK's burgeoning economic and strategic ambitions in North Asia.

While Beijing consistently calls for a return to the Six Party Talks, the U.S. and ROK talk of "improvements in behavior" that must be demonstrated first. Without benefit of time travel to undo the sinking of the *Cheonan* and the detonation of two atomic devices, it is difficult to determine what the North Koreans could do to endear themselves to the U.S. and ROK governments at this point.

With this background, North Korea's anti-diplomacy has recently sounded a frantic note.

In early November, the DPRK invited Stanford professor and emeritus director

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of the Los Alamos National Laboratory, Siegfried Hecker, to tour a new and previously unknown uranium enrichment facility. Hecker described the facility as state of the art, as opposed to the dismal Soviet-style exhibits the North Koreans had previously displayed, a rather surprising development considering the economic and sanctions-related difficulties that the DPRK has recently endured. The facility is set up to produce lightly enriched uranium (LEU) of the type used to fuel civilian nuclear reactors; it is not piped with the arrangement of centrifuges suitable for production of highly enriched uranium (HEU) for nuclear weapons. But, of course, it could be, as Hecker reported: "[T]he senior Yongbyon official confirmed that they are enriching uranium now in the facility. When I pointed out that the outside world will be concerned about their ability to convert the facility to make HEU, he stated that anyone can tell by looking at the monitors in the control room that the cascades are configured for LEU. Besides, he said, they can think what they want." (http://iis-db.stanford.edu/pubs/23035/HeckerYongbyon.pdf)

It is unlikely that giving the U.S. nonproliferation agenda an Iran-style enrichment headache is going to increase American eagerness to negotiate with Pyongyang, at least in the short term. Later that month, on November 23, the DPRK signaled its relations with its antagonist to the south, by pounding Yeonpyeong, an island in disputed waters garrisoned by South Korea, with a ferocious artillery barrage that killed four, including two civilians.

Presumably, this was meant as a demonstration to the South Korean government that there were definite costs to its policy of calculated disdain. However, the U.S.A. and ROK still cling to the line that there is nothing that the DPRK can do that can force them to resume the Six Party Talks.

The Lee Myung-bak government presented an interesting spectacle as it combined outrage with the studied insistence that the only necessary direct response to the Yeonpyeong Island shelling was to call for the resignation of the South Korean defense minister for failing pay attention to movements in North Korean artillery prior to the attack.

The Chinese government sent State Councilor Dai Bingguo to Seoul to make a show of pushing mediation on the issue and, inevitably, proposing a revival of the Six Party Talks. Lee Myung-bak pointedly refused, and his office leaked the purported inside story of Dai's visit in the most insulting terms possible, listing Dai's transgressions "against diplomatic protocol," his "inappropriate" behavior, "tedious speechifying," calling his visit "a series of incomprehensible blunders from start to finish."

This sort of mudslinging is of a piece with the characterization of China's representative at the Six Party Talks, Wu Dawei. According to another cable from the Wikileaks trove, an unnamed official participating in a meeting between the U.S. ambassador to the ROK and Vice Foreign Minister Chun Young-woo stated that Wu is an "arrogant, Marx-spouting former Red Guard who 'knows nothing about North Korea, nothing about nonproliferation, and is hard to communicate with because he doesn't speak English.'" (http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/249870)

Will the Democratic People's Republic of Korea belatedly fling itself into China's economic embrace and turn the northern half of the peninsula into a prosperous satrapy of Beijing?

This contemptuous treatment of China's diplomats may have the goal of poisoning the well and disqualifying China (and its preferred Six Party framework) as effective interlocutors in peninsular affairs. In any case, it is good politics: China's refusal to condemn North Korea for the Yeonpyeong shelling is extremely unpopular inside the ROK. China has made its position relatively clear. Its good offices in dealing with the DPRK problem will be available within the framework of Six Party Talks, i.e., discussions that include North Korea as an equal and are predicated, at least by implication, on the idea of the DPRK's continued existence.

Despite persistent Western efforts to depict China as shirking its international obligations as a regional power out of fecklessness and timidity – and thereby endangering its relations with the ROK, the U.S., and Japan – by declining to exert pressure on North Korea, it is more plausible to conclude that China has a firm grasp of its national interest and believes it will gain nothing by abandoning Pyongyang and knuckling under to three governments that are fundamentally hostile to China's aspirations.

In the end, Beijing is calculating that its neighbors' need for peace and prosperity in harmony with China will trump their desire to make common cause with the United States to contain and confront Beijing. It is, therefore, willing to go along with North Korean brinksmanship. The Chinese media consistently transcribe and amplify dire North Korean statements emphasizing the threat of war on the peninsula and incessantly urges the resumption of the Six Party Talks as a panacea.

Lee Myung-bak, on the other hand, has no interest in doing anything to prolong the survival of the regime in Pyongyang and will try to sidestep calls for talks by waving the bloody shirt of Yeonpyeong and demanding an apology from North Korea as a precondition for talks.

The Obama administration, whose domestic political difficulties preclude any North Korea-related initiatives that could be construed as appeasement by the out-for-blood GOP, has little alternative but to coordinate its policies with Lee Myung-bak's. With both the DPRK and the ROK inclined toward confrontational posturing and China and the United States loathe to intervene prematurely to rein in their allies, the potential for trouble is surprisingly high.

And the situation also holds the ultimate geopolitical risk for Seoul and Washington: that the North Korean leadership, with its back against the wall and despairing of any productive intercourse with South Korea and the United States, will belatedly fling itself into China's economic embrace and turn the northern half of the peninsula into a prosperous satrapy of Beijing. **CP**

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Serge Avedikian's "Barking Island"

Dog Slaughter as Overture to the Armenian Genocide

By Larry Portis

I think by now we can forget about the slogan "never again." The real question is, "how long to the next genocide?" In this time of capitalist crisis and growing political disaffection, will war provide opportunities to whip up some crusade aiming to ostracize and even physically annihilate victims on a mass scale, most obviously those who profess belief in a different deity and, collaterally, those politically troublesome people who deny deities altogether?

Serge Avedikian doesn't explicitly ask these questions in his new film, *Barking Island* (*Chienne d'histoire* in French). In fact, no one says a word about anything. It is an animated film about dogs. But it is not one of those Disney-type productions, where the dogs (or other animals) speak in a human tongue and express ideas and emotions. No. In this film, the dogs live in an environment ruled by human beings, but there is no dialogue to disturb our perception of the social relations existing between the canines and *homo sapiens.*

The remarkable thing about this film is the contrast between its aesthetic beauty and the horror it recounts. The animated images are paintings rendered by a young artist Thomas Azuélos. The luminous depth of the colors, the invocations of oriental Constantinople and the ferocity of the figures are sublimely, compellingly cruel. This is great art, and it is not surprising that Avedikian was given the Palme d'Or at Cannes for this 15-minute film.

The plan to kill upward of one and a half million Armenians between 1915 and 1918 requred careful planning and rational experimentation. This is where the dogs came in. Cleansing Constantinople of the thousands of dogs roaming free there provided a fine opportunity to test methods used later on the Armenians. In 1910, the government of the Young Turks enlisted the best European scientists in their effort to find a solution to get rid of the homeless dog population. The Pasteur Institute in Paris provided a study explaining the scientific options, several of which were attempted. The use of toxic gases in specially constructed vehicles was proposed, as was the subsequent rendering of the corpses into hides and meat. Incineration in specially designed ovens was another envisioned solution.

The problem for the Turkish authorities was financial. In practice, cost-benefit analysis made modern methods unacceptable. The potential expenditures for developing the needed technology for canine extermination overrode available resources. So, it was back to the drawing board. At some point, it was suggested that the animals be simply rounded up

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and transported to a desert island in the Bosporus. It would be an open-air dog pound where, eventually, about 30,000 offending creatures were concentrated. And there the extermination proceeded. The fact that no vegetation or other edible substance existed on the island ensured a definitive resolution to the nuisance they represented. The island was too far from land to allow the creatures to swim back, although many tried. The only disagreeable aspect of the plan, once put into operation, were winds that conveyed the sounds of screams and howls to Constantinople. But this annoyance ceased after a few weeks.

The massacre of the Armenians followed much the same pattern. Although gassing, burning, drowning, the injection of typhus bacilli in children, and other imaginable methods were employed, in the end most of the victims were forcibly displaced and died from exhaustion and starvation.

Real understanding of the murder of one and a half million Armenians beginning in April of 1915 must include knowledge about the preparations for that national effort to cleanse a "modernizing" Turkey of people considered to be outside the pale of "Turkish identity." The Armenian Christian population of Turkey had long served as scapegoats in times of stress due to the declining fortunes of the Ottoman Empire. The attacks against them increased in intensity throughout the 19th century. Between 1894 and 1896, around 300,000 were killed in various urban centers. Around 30,000 were slaughtered in and around the southern city of Adana in 1909. But these were only the most dramatically massive misfortunes befalling the Armenians over a long period.

Increasing numbers of Armenians saw their salvation in having "autonomy" and "independence," as did Jews attracted to a messianic "Zionism" at the same time. The logic inherent in the process is a striking perversity: the realization of the national aspirations of one group means the physical elimination of others, either by removing them from one place to another or using the radical and, it is thought, definitive (or "final") means of group murder.

Thus opened the 20th century with the application of scientific rationalism in the service of the religion of nationalism against those who are "out of place" in the nationalistic scheme of things. The tragedy of the process is that the most prominent victims themselves turned to nationalist solutions in order to protect themselves. It was an understandable reaction, one that confirmed the Turkish mantra that Armenians could not be assimilated into the Turkish "nation."

The Young (which is say "modern" and "progressive") Turks had, they thought, to clear the field for the building of a new state. In their turn, the Nazis propagated the idea that Germany had to be purified of its "blood" enemies in its social and cultural reconstruction. In both cases, and many others, the new "religion of nationalism" (as Carl Jung called it) was a driving force.

For Serge Avedikian, the nationalist mindset is the real problem. This is the meaning of the dog massacre. He explained this during an interview at the Mediterranean Film Festival (Montpellier, France, October 22-30,

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"I chose this story because I think there has been no greater misfortunate than the invention of the nation state. I am absolutely opposed to the very notion of nationality as an official type of identity. An identity cannot be 'national' because identities are necessarily multiple, plural, conjugated. Defining anyone in such a standard way is unacceptable." For him, the acceleration of communications of all kinds has paradoxically made people more and more nomadic, like the dogs.

How does Avedikian see himself? "I was born in Yerevan, Armenia, but I live in France and have French 'nationality,' and I also have a memory. My grandfather lived in Constantinople in 1910, it was the moment when empires were breaking up and when nationalism was being imposed on everyone. The eradication of the dogs is evocative of what this government – that of the Young Turks, fascinated by Europe as they were – wished to accomplish. The major players were European dandies. They were educated in Paris for the most part, and many of them were Freemasons. They were secular positivists fascinated by science and anxious to change the world. When they returned to Turkey, it was with the idea of transforming it according to a European model. For them, the groups of errant dogs were emblematic of an intolerable disorder typical of a backward society and culture."

Why is the story important? "It is an atrocious story. And the implications are clear. I am convinced that if there had been a Nuremberg-style trial of those who carried out the genocide of the Armenians, it is very possible that the Nazis would not have been able to pursue their own genocidal project. It is the belief in impunity that allows little and big dictators to act. All this is undoubtedly complex, but I think crimes are repeated when their authors are not held accountable."

What does all this portend? "The condition of dogs in Muslim countries is very particular. On the one hand, dogs are not generally allowed inside human dwellings. They are considered to be impure. But, on the other hand, they are recognized as having a social function and have the right to live. In fact, dogs are accepted and protected in these countries as nowhere else. In 1910, there were many examples of people interfering with the collection and deportation of the dogs. But the film is really concerned with more than just the events of 1910. Let me put it this way: modernization, especially urbanization, and now globalization, means the death of the free dogs. The dogs were scapegoats then, and now there is no room for free agents anywhere. Whoever is on the margins, who is nonconventional, who refuses being controlled and forced into the national-state mold, will be an object of such repression. How many errant dogs or errant people will be allowed to exist? That is the question." **CP**

Serge Avedikian is now preparing a documentary called *The Dogs of Istanbul*. For information, contact ron@sacrebleuprod.com.

Larry Portis' book *Qu'est-ce que le fascisme? Un phénomène social d'hier et d'aujourd'hui* (*What is Fascism? A Social Phenomenon Yesterday and Today*) will be released in December 2010. He can be reached at larry.portis@orange.fr.

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